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President's summary

Evolution of the international trading system and its trends from a development perspective

(Agenda item 6)

The evolving multilateral trading system

1. In their presentations, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, the Executive Director of the International Trade Centre and the Director-General of the World Trade Organization spoke on the importance of development and cooperation in supporting inclusive sustainable development for all. The evolving multilateral trading system should aim to be more inclusive, spreading poverty reduction and food security benefits more evenly, while safeguarding the natural environment. There was a need for empowerment, as it was difficult for developing countries, least developed countries, women, smallholders, and small and medium-sized enterprises to integrate into global value chains. Further, it was important to target realistic deliverables at the forthcoming tenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. Longer-term development issues, particularly agricultural subsidies, still needed to be successfully addressed.

2. Many representatives of developing countries expressed concern over current mega-regional trade and investment agreements, which excluded most developing countries while profoundly affecting them. One delegation requested that UNCTAD conduct a study on the likely impact of the mega-regional agreements and on investor–State dispute settlements.

3. The Director of the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities of UNCTAD, introduced document TD/B/62/2 prepared by the secretariat. He outlined the recent trends and changes in the global trading system and gave particular attention to the manner in which trade and the work of UNCTAD would contribute to achieving sustainable development goals and implementing the post-2015 development agenda.

Connecting trade and trade policy with sustainable development goals

4. Senior representatives of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia discussed how to connect trade and trade policy with sustainable development goals.

5. Regional integration was a means of achieving economic, social and environmental objectives and implementing sustainable development goals. One panellist highlighted the importance of trade transparency and efficiency by producing standards and recommendations for trade facilitation; another introduced projects on the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises, the carbon footprint of food exports and definition of product environmental standards. Yet another argued that, for Africa, much would depend on the outcome of the Continental Free Trade Area in goods and services.

The role of smallholder farmers in sustainable commodities production and trade

6. In the first of several panel presentations, the UNCTAD secretariat reviewed key challenges and opportunities for smallholders in sustainable commodities production and trade. One panellist described the Purchase for Progress programme and how it responded to many smallholders' needs. Another analysed ways to address the demand of African

small and medium-sized enterprises for agro-processing capacities, while yet another highlighted the role of smallholders' associations in building solutions for the sustainability of the smallholder model.

7. Participants explored the role of smallholders in food security and social development, wondering how to offer them better support. Improving access to land, fertilizers and finance were important for the sustainability and profitability of smallholder operations. Further, developing social protection and microinsurance schemes for smallholders was critical for their development.

8. Stalling negotiations in the ongoing Doha Round was an obstacle to the improvement of smallholders' conditions. Moreover, several delegations noted the multiplicity of technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary standards, which in their view were actually non-tariff barriers to market access by small producers.